

ROBSON-HARRINGTON PARK
237 Crescent Avenue
San Anselmo
Marin County
California

HALS CA-25
CA-25

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ROBSON-HARRINGTON PARK

HALS NO. CA-25

Location: 237 Crescent Avenue, San Anselmo, Marin County, CA
Lat: 37.97565 Long: -122.56960

Significance: This property is significant because of its truly unique and fanciful artistic craftsmanship and for its association with Edwin Wood who founded the E.K. Wood Lumber Company, incorporated in California in 1895, that prospered with large holdings in Washington and Oregon, docks in Oakland and San Pedro, a fleet of vessels plying its trade up and down the coast, and local yards and mills in Los Angeles, Oakland, San Rafael, San Anselmo, Fresno, San Francisco, and Bellingham, Washington.

History: The front entry to Robson-Harrington Park is defined by a low stone wall with pillars at the corner and entry drive. A walk parallels the driveway and is made with terra-cotta pavers with a redwood grained motif. This material continues to the front porch where it is laid in a herringbone pattern. The front garden looks much like a traditional early 20th century garden with curving expanses of lawn, shrub beds and a variety of mature specimen trees, but once in the garden you discover a unique brick wall constructed with a combination of standard brick and irregular chunks of what look like infinite variety changing height, width and detailing. It forms arches, lines steps and terraces, and defines a group barbeque area on the lower level of the sloping site. Along the way one discovers one-of-a-kind pieces of glazed terra-cotta medallions varying in size from 4" to 26" round and rectangular pieces. All are glazed in ivory and or blue. It is a fanciful and organic garden that invites exploration and discovery.

The property includes a large expanse of lawn surrounded by a small redwood grove and an assortment of other trees, including an exceptional *Crataegus cordata*/Washington thorn. Currently, the area adjacent to the house is used for community gardening in terraced beds.

The residence on this property was completed in 1906 and was built for Edwin Kleber Wood on a 2.68 acre parcel. Wood was the son of farmers who served in the civil war prior to starting a career in the timber industry. His lumber company grew to be one of the largest in Michigan. In 1885, he served in the Michigan legislature. At this time Wood expanded his lumber business to the west coast and moved first to San Francisco and then Oakland, California. His Marin lumber yard, which opened in 1905, was one of the largest in Marin County. In 1917 when Edwin Woods died the property was valued at \$2 million.

In 1923, Wood's sons sold the property to Kernan and Geraldine Robson. Kernan was the son of Albert L. Robson and Frances Harrington. Kernan attended

Wesleyan University, Harvard Divinity School and Oxford prior to becoming a Professor of English. Later he formed a real estate partnership.

The Robsons planted extensive orchards and a vineyard. They added the curving brick walls using bricks salvaged from property acquired by Kernan's real estate dealings. They built archways, fountains and elaborate niches throughout the property.

The property was deeded to the City of San Anselmo upon Geraldine's death in 1967.

Sources: History of the Robson-Harrington House by Judy Coy, Historical Commissioner, from the San Anselmo Historical Museum website.
www.sananselmohistory.org/robson1.html

E-mails from Judy Coy dated Jan. 26 and Feb. 18, 2009. Ms. Coy notes that Lawrence Schwin III of Arnold Lerner, Architect, San Francisco, CA prepared a Historical Resources Inventory dated November 25, 1988. She also mentions Thomas Brown, Landscape Architect as being familiar with the garden, and notes that the son of Thomas Harrel, who was an employee of Kernan Robson, is still living in San Anselmo. The son worked in the garden as a youth.

Site visit made on Jan. 11, 2009 by Chris Pattillo.

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Figure 1. Arched gateway from the outdoor barbeque area looking out onto the lawn and Redwood grove on the right (Chris Pattillo, January 11, 2009).



Figure 2. Terra cotta medallion embedded in brick and slag wall that surrounds the property (Chris Pattillo, January 11, 2009).